

# A SCOTTISH SHTETL

## Jewish Life in the Gorbals

### 1880-1974



£1.00

**From: Chaim Bermant**

I never lived in the Gorbals, but rather wished I had.

I had been brought up in a small shtetle in Latvia, and when we moved to Glasgow I was overwhelmed by the change, and didn't like it a bit. I missed the vast open skies, the fields, the forests, the lakes, the streams in which we played in the summer and on which we skated in the winter. In Glasgow I felt imprisoned. We had a nice, even post, flat in Battlefield, with lead-latticed panels in the front door, and a stained glass screen in the bathroom, and a bath, and electricity and running water and, most marvellous of all, a radio, none of which we had in Latvia, but one didn't have the same sense of freedom. I wandered beyond one row of houses and shops only to find another, and then another, and another still, stretching onwards beyond the scope of imagination. There seemed no escape.

And then one day we went to the Gorbals. It was even more hemmed in than Battlefield, but in a sense it was a homecoming, for I heard the sound of Yiddish and the sight of Yidden, and I saw Yiddish lettering on some of the shop fronts. It wasn't like the shtetle I came from, but it had something of the atmosphere of the nearby town of Dvinsk. There were first of all the smells, the barrels of salt herrings by the doorways of the open shops, and the warm, freshly-baked bread, the Russian loaves and the sweet-and-sour in Ettingers and Fogels and in Arkie Loan's. Leon I remember especially, a large rotund man like a huge pear on top of a vast pumpkin. And then the kosher butchers, Lucas and Warren and Jacobs and Henry with their heaps of mince-meat and dangling rolls of wurst in the front windows.

As I grew older I used to be sent on errands to the Gorbals — the red tram, No. 11 to Milngavie, passed Gorbals Cross — to Kroin Street and Rudeglen Road, which I recognised vaguely as Crown Street and Rutherglen Road, but I could never find Tessie Street until I concluded it must be Thistle Street. I wouldn't be able to find any of them now. The Gorbals itself is lost.

When I was 13 I went nightly through the black-out to Yeshiva (Rabbinical College) in the basement of the Great Synagogue in South Portland Street. Occasionally I was treated to a meal in Geneens, in Abbotsford Place, almost across the way, and even though one was limited to the spare fare available in war-time I still recall it as the best kosher restaurant I have ever used.

Shortly after the war I had a visitor from London who asked me to take her on a conducted tour through the Gorbals, presumably for the thrill of it. She had heard all sorts of gory stories of murder and mayhem, with razor gangs at each others' throats, and half expected to see blood gurgling in the gutters. She was disappointed. The only violence that I personally have witnessed in the Gorbals has been committed by the planners.

Signed — Chaim Bermant

18 Hill Rise, London NW11 6NA

## Introduction

It is difficult to believe that the Gorbals once contained a large and thriving Jewish community, at its peak, numbered several thousand, with half a dozen synagogues, a Jewish Institute, a Hebrew school, and a large number of Jewish butchers, bakers, tailors, furriers, joiners, and other businesses. Yet today, hardly any Jews remain in the Gorbals, and not a single Jewish building survives. Indeed 1984 marks the tenth anniversary of the demolition of the last Jewish building in the Gorbals, thus ending almost a hundred years of Jewish settlement.

## The First Jews in Glasgow

The first Jewish community in Glasgow grew up not in the Gorbals, but in the centre and west end of the city, where Jews settled in the early years of the 19th Century. The first of those Jews was Isaac Cohen, a hatter, who introduced the silk hat to Scotland, and who was admitted as a Freeman of the city in 1812. The first Jews to come to Glasgow were not, on the whole, poor refugees, but rather merchants and businessmen, largely of German and Dutch origin.

The first synagogue, (or house of worship) was established in the High St. in 1823, and by 1831 there were 47 Jews in the city. In 1832, a Jewish burial ground was opened in the Necropolis, and, as the community expanded, the synagogue moved to larger premises, in such places as Candleriggs, George St., and Howard St. By 1850, the community numbered 200, and in 1858, the synagogue moved to the corner of George St. and John St. By 1879, when some 700 Jews lived in Glasgow, the first purpose-built synagogue was opened in Garnet St., and the beautiful Garnethill Synagogue is still in use today.

## Influx of East European Jews

The Jewish community which grew up in the Gorbals from the late 19th Century onwards was different in character to the existing community in the west end. These Jews were mostly poor refugees from Tsarist Russia — tradesmen, such as furriers, tailors, and joiners, or travelling pedlars. They came from the 'Pale of Settlement', that area of the Russian Empire to which most of its Jews had been confined since the late 18th Century. Four or five million Jews lived in this area, which included the Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and much of Poland.

By the late 19th Century, Jews were restricted to living in the cities of the 'Pale', which became overcrowded. They could only follow certain occupations, and were discriminated against in schools and universities. From time to time, prejudice against Jews erupted into vicious attacks on their lives and property — known as pogroms — such as in Kishinev (1903) and Odessa (1905). In the face of such hardship, some Jews joined revolutionary political movements, such as the Bolsheviks, Socialists, and Bundists, to try to achieve radical improvements in Russian society, or became Zionists, to try to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Huge numbers of Russian Jews, however, took an even more decisive step, and between 1881 and 1930, one out of every three Jews in eastern Europe — approximately four million — emigrated, to seek a new life in the U.S.A., Britain, Canada, France, South Africa, South America, or Palestine. They sought an easier life in the west, where they could have freedom to practise their religion, carry on their businesses, and educate their children.

Approximately 210,000 of these Jews came to Britain, mainly to London, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow. Most of those who came to Glasgow settled in the Gorbals, and the Jewish population of Glasgow increased from 700 in 1879 to 4,000 by 1897, 6,500 by 1902, 9,000 by 1919, and 15,000 by 1935.



## Synagogues in the Gorbals

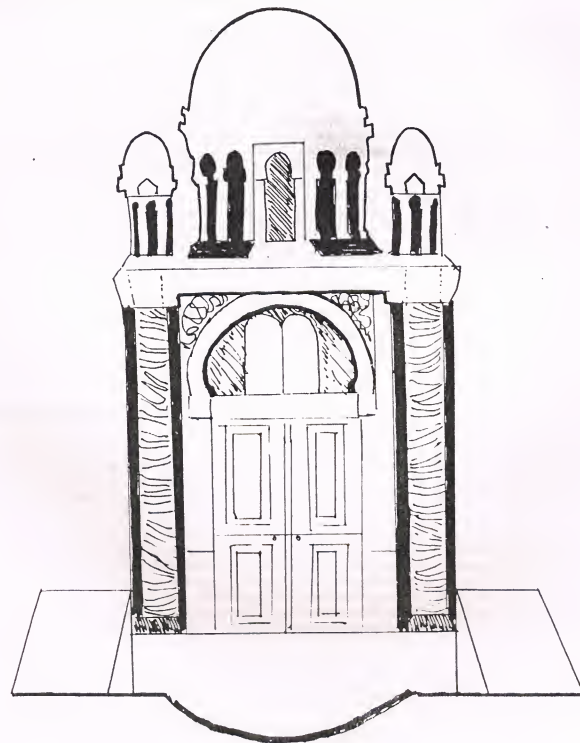
Perhaps the three most important aspects of the Jewish religion are prayer, education, and charity. The Jewish community in the Gorbals at one time supported five or six synagogues, where they gathered to pray.

Garnethill Synagogue was unable to meet the needs of the vast influx of Russian and Polish Jews who were settling in the Gorbals. In 1880, a Jewish congregation met in a private house at 9 Park Place, and from 1881 to 1886, in Commerce St. In May, 1886, a meeting was held to establish a South Side branch of the Glasgow Hebrew Congregation, and a synagogue was opened in Rutherglen Rd. As the Gorbals community grew, so did the number of congregations. An off-shoot of the Rutherglen Rd. synagogue moved to the Standard Halls at 45 Main St. (Gorbals St.) in 1887. In 1901, they opened the first purpose-built synagogue in the Gorbals at 93 South Portland St. The Great Synagogue remained the largest in the Gorbals, until its closure in 1974.

The Chevra Kadisha ('Holy Congregation') synagogue was established in 1889. In 1898 it purchased the old Baptist Church at 33 Buchan St., and converted it for use as a synagogue, opening in 1899, and in use until 1972.

The third major synagogue was the Bes Hamedrash Hagadol ('Great House of Study') which originally rented the old Free Church at 42 Govan St., moving to Thistle St. in 1902, and in 1925 opening the New Central Synagogue at the corner of Hospital St. and Rutherglen Rd., in use until 1956.

There were other small congregations, which often met in private houses, such as the Beth Jacob ('House of Jacob') Synagogue, established in 1905 in Gorbals St., and later at 36 Abbotsford Place, and the Poalei Tzedek ('Workers of Righteousness') Synagogue, at 111 Oxford St. Often Jews who had emigrated from the same small town in Eastern Europe would meet together to form a prayer group, or minuan.





## Jewish Education

Great emphasis is placed by Jews on study and education. The Jews in the Gorbals established the Talmud Torah Hebrew School at 13 Clyde Terrace in 1895, with Dr M. Friedlander as Director of Education. By 1897, there were 130 children being taught there. In 1899, classes moved to Gorbals Public School in Buchan St., but by the early Twenties, there were 500 pupils, and the Talmud Torah opened its own building in Turiff St., where generations of young Gorbals Jews learned about their religion, until its closure in the mid-Sixties. There was a peak of 700 pupils in 1927, and a branch of the school was opened back in Buchan St.

Children attended the Hebrew school on Sundays and some weekday evenings, but Jewish education also took place in the primary schools. As early as 1885, more than half of the pupils of Gorbals Primary School in Carlton Place were Jewish, and by 1921, there were still 600 Jewish pupils. These children were withdrawn from their classes during religious instruction, and given their own Jewish lessons and prayers.

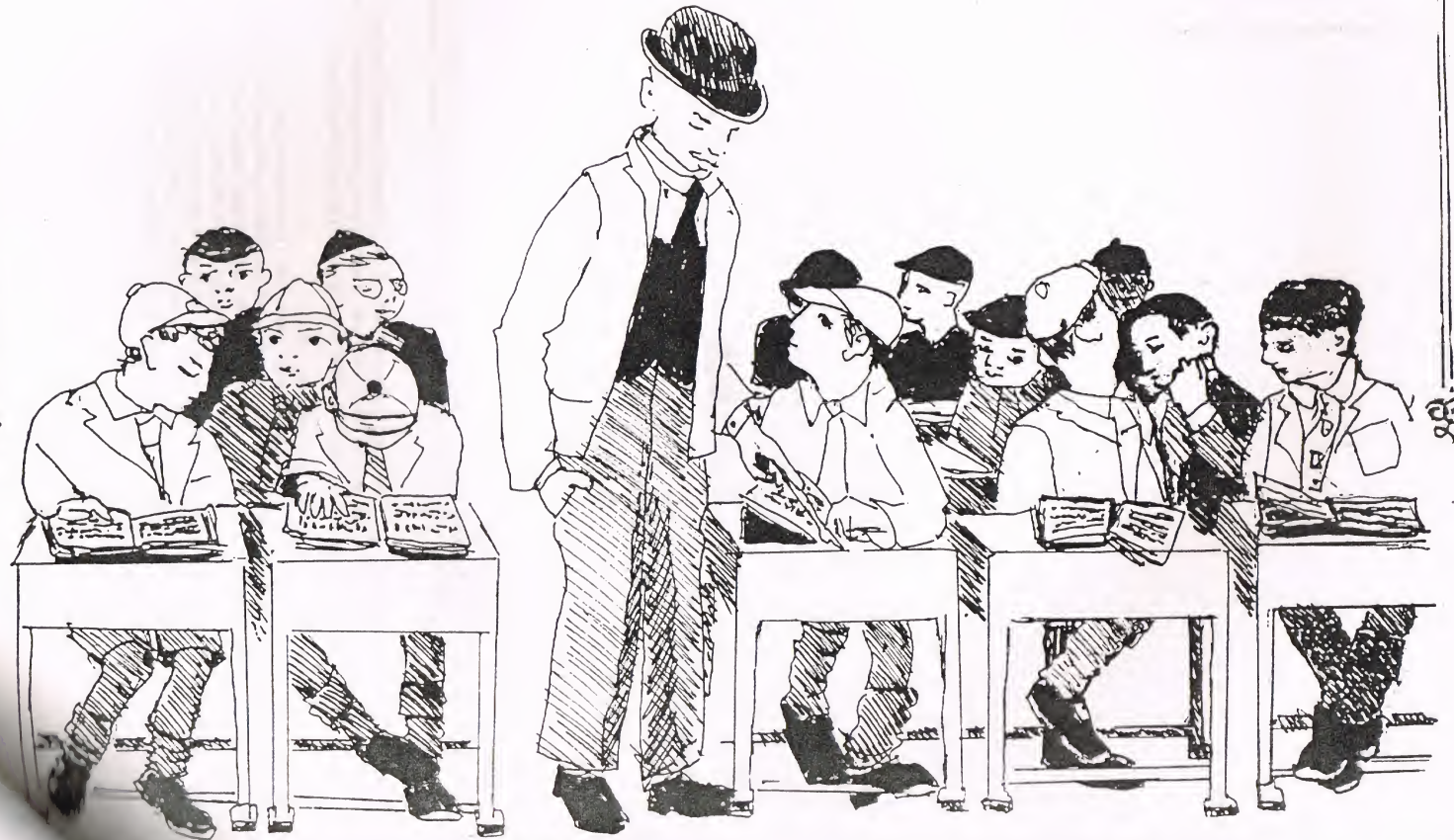
## Welfare Groups

A Jewish community always looks after the welfare of its less fortunate members. The Glasgow Hebrew Philanthropic Society was founded in 1858, and was later renamed the Glasgow Jewish Board of Guardians. Originally in John St., then Apsley Place, it opened a welfare centre at 52 Thistle St. in 1927. In a time before the Welfare State, poor or needy Jews in the Gorbals were not allowed to become a burden on the wider community, but were looked after by their fellow Jews. The Board of Guardians gave weekly pensions and grants to assist the needy, the infirm and the aged. The Glasgow Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society, also founded in 1858, and later located in Thistle St., distributed food, clothes and coal, as well as visiting the sick. The Glasgow Hebrew Boot and Clothing Guild, established in 1906 (and merged with the Board of Guardians in 1949) provided similar assistance, and also arranged holidays and outings for poor children. The Board of Guardians set up an employment bureau to find jobs for school-leavers — a particular problem in the Twenties and Thirties, as now. The 'hachnassath Kallah' Society (established 1936) helped needy brides. The Glasgow Jewish Welfare Centre and Clinic at 42 Abbotsford Place gave medical, dental and foot treatment to mothers and children, and even boasted sun-ray apparatus. Lectures were given to mothers on child welfare. The Glasgow Hebrew Benevolent Loan Society, founded in 1888, and later moving to Thistle St. from Portugal St., had granted nearly £90,000 in loans by the late 1930s. Finally, the Glasgow Hebrew Burial Society, set up in 1907, and with offices in 33 Rutherglen Rd., provided free burials for poorer members of the community.

## Jewish Representative Council

52 Thistle St. was also home to the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, which was formed at a meeting of delegates of all Glasgow Jewish organisations and institutions in South Portland St. Synagogue in October, 1913. This arose out of an earlier meeting held to protest against the trial in Warsaw of Mendel Beilis, on the age-old charge of ritual murder. It was felt that there should be a permanent umbrella body of the Jewish community. The first president of the Council, which is still in existence, was Mr J. Hallside (1913-15), followed by Mr Ellis Isaacs (1915-29), Mr M. Olsberg (1929-32), and Mr Joseph Sachs (1932-35).

An important function of this Council was to represent the community to the local authorities. In 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, all aliens in Glasgow had to register themselves with the police authorities. Many of them were immigrants, who had come to this country without any papers, and the Scottish Office agreed to recognise as valid birth certificates issued by the Jewish Representative Council, who issued over 1600 such documents. Later in the war, it was proposed to intern or deport all Jews born in the enemy countries of Austria-Hungary, Germany or Turkey, but the Scottish Office agreed to accept the guarantee of the Council for the good conduct of these people.



## Social Activities & Cultural Life

The Jewish community ran a large number of social and cultural activities, most of which were centred in the Jewish Institute, next door to the Great Synagogue in South Portland St. The Bar Cochba Sports Club, founded in 1933, was located at 16 Turiff St., and had a membership of 250 young men and women by the late 1930s. The Glasgow Jewish Girls' Social and Recreation Club, founded in the early 1920s at 41 Abbotsford Place, offered social, educational and recreational facilities. The Jewish Lad's Brigade was founded by Benjamin Strump in the early 1900s, and was a version of the Boys' Brigade. It had club rooms at 81 Nicholson St., and boasted probably the only Jewish kilted pipe-band in the world. There was an Oxford Star Club football team from 1910, and a Glasgow Jewish Choral Society from 1929.

A number of Jewish masonic groups existed in the Gorbals by the Thirties, with various branches of 'the Grand Order of Israel and Shield of David', and the 'Independent Order B'nei Brith'. The Workers' Circle, at 150 Gorbals St., founded in 1912, provided the usual benefits of a friendly society, and took an active interest in educational work.

The Gorbals Library, at the corner of South Portland St., had a Jewish Section for many years. The 'Jewish Chronicle' of 1935 stated that the library had: 'a fine section devoted to Yiddish and Hebrew literature, comprising a total of 1,000 books.

## Zionist Activity

The Glasgow Jewish community was active early on in the Zionist movement, which aimed to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In 1891, there were meetings on this theme in the synagogues in Garnethill and Main St. In 1894, the first Zionist group — 'Chovevei Zion' ('Lovers of Zion') — was formed, and in 1898, the Glasgow Zionist Society. By the time of the fourth international Zionist Congress in London in 1900, Glasgow delegates were already attending with their own flag, a Star of David enclosed in the centre of a Scottish Lion Rampant. There was a Zionist youth movement — 'Habonim' ('The Builders') — in Turiff St. The leading Glasgow Zionist in the Thirties was probably Mr Fred Nettler, a local furrier. The Glasgow Zionist Centre was opened in 39 Queens Square in 1936.

## THE INSTITUTE

The Jewish Institute dates from around 1900, when a group of Jews in the Gorbals funded a Social Club for the community. The club met in a variety of premises in its early years, such as Ingram Street, Sauchiehall Street, Jamaica Street, Gorbals Street, Abbotsford Place and Carlton Place. By the 1920's the Institute had outgrown these places, and the MacNicol Memorial Church in South Portland Street, next door to the Great Synagogue, was purchased and converted for the community's use, opening in 1935.

The Jewish Institute owed its origins to several earlier clubs, principally one founded around 1900 by Mr Bloom, who was the oldest Jewish ex-serviceman in Glasgow, having served in the Boer War, and then the '14-'18 War. With other Jewish ex-servicemen he held an open-air meeting at Gorbals Cross, and 50 to 60 members enrolled to form the Jewish ex-Servicemen's Club. The first meeting was held in the Jewish library in Norfolk Street.

They continued to hold meetings, whist drives, annual dinners, and dances, first in Renfrew Street, then in the basement of a small cinema, the '2 EE's' in Eglinton Street. Six months after this move, they had 500 members.

In 1925 came a division of interest, and the Glasgow Jewish Institute was formed, while the ex-service tradition continued in the formation of the Jewish Branch of the British Legion.

In 1935, premises were opened in South Portland Street, next to the Great Synagogue. The great days of the Institute began now, when it became a centre, still fondly remembered, by the Jews of the Gorbals.

The building was spacious enough to provide facilities for athletics, drama, chess, bridge, a ladies section, a literary and debating society, a library, a restaurant, and a spacious and beautiful ball-room.

During the 30's, and the war period, and the years immediately following the war the Institute flourished. It hummed with life. Entertainment was first class. Many of the musicians who played for the dances went on to join, or like Harry Margolis, to form, first class bands. On Sunday nights, top stars playing at the Empire, frequently dropped in — Vic Oliver, Max Bacon, Joe Loss — for impromptu appearance. And what dances, what audiences, they must have been, to generate the warmth and vitality that would attract such talent. Nor was the talent all 'visiting'. For, by the mid 30's the Institute Players had begun their brilliant career, inspired by Avrom Greenbaum — but that is a story of its own. The Literary Society was meeting weekly, with packed halls, attracting top speakers, entering public speaking contests, and by the wide range of interest in the audience. The Chess team, the Golf section, the Billiard section were all not only providing amusement and social life for the community, but were competing and winning — nationally.

There were weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. There were annual sails down the Clyde, filling a whole steamer with people and music and fun. Servicemen in the war came. The old came. The young came.

Listening to people speak of this, in today's beleaguered Gorbals, makes many impressions, of the vitality and talent that abounded; of a place that was a hub for a furiously revolving wheel; of a crowded, active, creative dynamic centre in the middle of the tenement streets.

By the 50's though, a note of uncertainty appeared — an uncertainty that mirrored the Gorbals condition of that time. During the war period, the tenements, almost all owned by absentee landlords, had degenerated rapidly and appalling; the pressures brought upon them by the post-war housing shortage had divided the old flats into warrens of subdivisions. Many people were moving out — or thinking of the Gorbals as a temporary shelter until "they got a house". This changing atmosphere affected the Institute, which was faced with a difficult choice — maintaining standards with fewer supporters and risking financial collapse — or staying solvent by introducing entertainment which would make money, but drive some of the more vital groups away. Bingo won. But only for a while.

By the 60's, the planners had set the reconstruction of the Gorbals in motion. There is a sad photograph in a Jewish Echo of 1970, of the Institute and the Synagogue standing alone in the middle of bulldozed South Portland Street. By then, the decimation of the Gorbals was well advanced. Long before then, the Institute dynamo had throbbed its last throb, and a new home had been found. Not long after the last photograph, even the buildings had vanished.



## GENEENS

The Institute's many-faceted activities, its vitality and its richness were created by many people.

Geneens was created by one great lady, Mrs Sophie Geneen. It was firstly a hotel in the then elegant Abbotsford Place. It was a very good hotel that provided good food, comfort and warmth. From all over the city, Jews came to it for a meal to start and evening out. Many famous people stayed there — Richard Tauber, Joe Loss, Larry Adler, and many others. Business deals were settled, marriages arranged, funds collected, and meetings held.

But as well as this open and public life, Mrs Geneen made it a centre of compassion and peace. Many girls from poor families got their wedding dresses and trousseaux secretly there. Old people, cold and hungry got a meal and the chance to sit in a warm room for the afternoon. During the war refugees, soldiers on leave, or recovering from wounds found some healing there. From the kitchen food parcels were made up for families of soldiers and were delivered all over Scotland, to allied soldiers, far from their own people and countries. Food for festivals too went to Jewish prisoners in Barlinnie.

Through the door came a constant flow of the great and the needy, important people and people lost in the world, and from the door went help, and strength to Gorbals, Glasgow, all over Scotland and across to Israel.

Two great honours were paid to Mrs Geneen. One was the presentation to her of a forest of 10,000 trees in Israel, named the Sophie Geneen Forest.

The other honour came from the thousands of people who knew her as 'The Mother of Glasgow'.

Geneen's, the building, closed in 1965.

## THE INSTITUTE PLAYERS

In 1936, one of the most famous, and still enduring, voices of the Gorbals was Fierhead — the Institute Players. The Players at their start had great advantages — the greatest their founder, Avrom Greenbaum, a tailor, who had written his first play at the age of 22 and who continued to write movingly, sensitively, and wittily from then until he died in 1963. As well as writing, he was their producer and had the rare gift of being able to draw from any actor more than the actor thought he could give. In fact Avrom Greenbaum himself described how in the early days of the players, there was one play that he wrote, produced, acted in — and at the intervals played in the orchestra.

Another advantage came from the players themselves — the enthusiasm and capacity for hardwork which could produce at the beginning of their career two programmes and three one-act plays inside a four month period.

The disadvantages they had — and obviously overcame — were again described by Avrom Greenbaum. "Our first productions were put on on an improvised platform made to serve as a stage — curtains were weighted with bricks. Packing sheets blacked with paint were used for drapes." On the first night the audience was made up of sceptics and doting parents! But — "on the second night, there was standing room only."

They continued to surmount difficulties and in the earliest years won second and first places for the whole of Scotland in the Scottish Community Drama Association Festival — particularly with Avrom Greenbaum's play "Bread of Affliction".

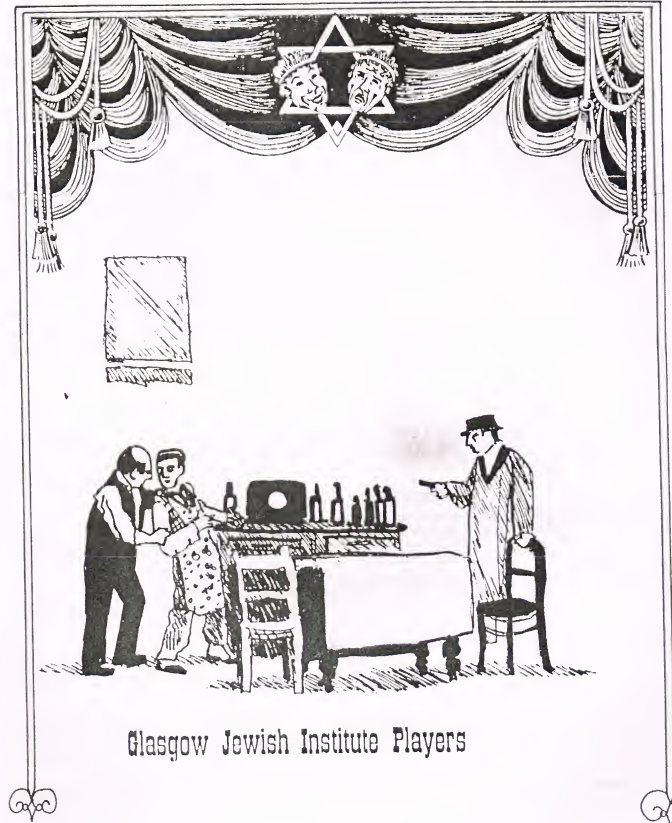
In 1938, Glasgow Jews funded the construction of the "Little Theatre" within the Institute, with good facilities and seating for 200. From then on, the Players flourished — with plays from Avrom Greenbaum — "Ecce Homo", "Children of Dreams", "The Fifth Line", following "Bread of Affliction", and the mime "Hymn without Praise", amongst the most successful — but also performing notable plays by European and American writers — Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, Copek, Martinescue — all writers with one thing in common — that they are concerned with man's fight against imprisonment — of any kind. 'The book and the sword are offered together from heaven' Greenbaum quoted in 1940.

With this kind of view of the function of the theatre it is not surprising that during the war years, the Institute Players worked very closely with the Unity Theatre, that great People's theatre of the 40's and 50's. Avrom Greenbaum frequently produced for them, and his plays were staged by them.

Productions were still mounted at the Jewish Institute — "Israel in the Kitchen", "The Late Christopher Bean", The Institute Players continued to win awards over the country, with plays reflecting the horrors of the Holocaust, and the battle for the Warsaw Ghetto.

As the Institute passed into its hard days productions there became more difficult — and in 1970 the new theatre in Coplaw Street was opened.

By this time, Avrom Greenbaum was dead, and the company was renamed the Avrom Greenbaum Players in honour of one of the greatest and most lovable sons of the Gorbals. Today, long after the Institute Players have left us, we who are still in the community find inspiration in the vision of the function of the theatre that they and their great founder left.



Glasgow Jewish Institute Players

## The Jewish Press in the Gorbals

It has been said that wherever Jews go, they set up a synagogue — and a newspaper. This has been true of the Gorbals.

A daily paper, the 'Glasgow Yiddishe Abendzeitung' (The Glasgow Jewish Evening Times) was established in 1914, selling for ½d.

Also in 1914, the 'Glasgow Yiddishe Stimme' — the Jewish Voice, a weekly was set up — it in its turn stimulated the English paper, the Jewish Voice, in 1928.

But the greatest survivor, and still a vital voice, was the 'Jewish Echo' founded by Zevi Golombok in 1928, continued today by Dr Golombok, in the last Jewish Building to survive in the Gorbals. We, the compilers of this book, are deeply indebted to Dr Golombok, without whose help we could not have tapped many sources.

The paper has not only been a local 'Glasgow' one but has reported through the years on the condition of all Jewry.

## Jewish Friendships

Amongst the quotations from conversations we have noted later, is one describing a typical scene at Gorbals Cross — with Jews meeting friends at one side of the Cross, and the Irish at the other — and there never being any trouble between them.

The Institute too, welcomed non-Jews as guests and organisations like the Players made further bridges of friendship. The literary and debating society, under Mr Crivan's leadership had speakers of all facets, and frequent inter-religious debates.

This spirit of friendship that was so real in the Gorbals formed the basis of many further moves towards positive inter religious and inter-racial relations that were later to become powerful forces in the city and in Scotland, and even further afield.

The first of these wider moves was the foundation in 1948 of the Scottish-Israel Friendship League, which now has many branches. Later when Pakistani and Indian immigration had become considerable, meetings with Pakistani leaders followed. Many of the problems they had were ones which the Jewish Community could help with. These 'alliances' led to annual inter-faith exhibitions, more meetings, much closer understanding amongst many people, and the building of bridges of peace and respect in areas of suspicion.

A great deal of this work, and its constant expansion, has been Mr Crivan's special concern. But it is good to remember, that the foundation of friendships made in the Gorbals have also helped.

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## The Political Life of the Jewish Gorbals by Paul Vincent

Glasgow Jewry is a microcosm of the people of Glasgow as a whole, for Glasgow is almost entirely made up of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants who have given to the life of the city a sliver of uniqueness, and themselves become recognizable and unmistakable Glaswegians.

Glasgow Jewry, which began to settle here soon after the Napoleonic Wars, would have remained a tiny group which would finally have vanished had it not been that Alexander the Third became czar of all the Russians in 1881. Some of the results of the anti-Semitic policies introduced by him are well represented in the film, "Fiddler on the Roof".

These policies of oppression and persecution led to millions of Jews having to leave Russia, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Some, at most about ten thousand, by the year 1910 became domiciled in Glasgow.

In the lands they had come from the Jews had pursued and built a way of life in which religious traditions and social changes had resulted in a culture known as Yiddish, which in its humanism and idealism made the culture of classical Greece (sculpture excepted) seem static and time-bound, as indeed it turned out to be.

In coming to this country the Jews of eastern Europe brought with them a strong awareness that politics really mattered, that it could and did affect one's life and that of one's children, and that politics was not simply a game played in debating chambers. Thus, while some brought the scrolls of the Holy Law with them, others carried a variety of political ideas. One of the strongest of these derived from the Bund, 'The General Federation of Jewish workers in Lithuania, Poland and Russia.' This was the Jewish Socialist Party founded at a conference in Vilna in 1897. The Bund served both as a trade union and a political party.

It is one of the most curious coincidences that in that very same year the First Zionist Council met in Bern, formed the World Zionist Organisation and elected the completely secular Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl as its first president.

A third facet brought to Glasgow by its newly arrived Jews was what in English might be called 'The Enlightenment'. This was an attempt to create a modern Hebrew literature and theatre.

Behind some of the black beards, therefore, much was going on. In some places it manifested itself in persons such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud or Albert Einstein. In others, the search for human dignity and understanding was carried on.

In 1890 a Jewish Tailors Union was formed in Glasgow. Later this joined a nationally organised group, the Amalgamated Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers Trade Union.

Not all the conversations around Gorbals Cross on a Sunday morning were simple social pleasantries. From one, the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council was formed in 1913. On this was present all the Jewish organisations in the city. Most were located in the Gorbals where most of the Jews lived. Some of the organisations were social, some political and some, the majority, were charitable or would-be charitable organisations. The reasons for this were simple. Most Jews, finding themselves in an industrial society which required specific skills which they did not possess, suffered dire poverty which weakened them physically and led to a high incidence of morbidity. It would take the Jews of the Gorbals a long time to pull themselves up by their own shoe laces. Many would never make it and many were the casualties that were to fall by the way. With mass unemployment and the small but nevertheless important introduction of some basic social benefits by the Liberal Government at the end of the first decade of this century, many of the incoming Jews, foreign and unfamiliar with the native language found themselves seriously hindered in obtaining even the basic needs of life.

Yet even with these disabilities they found in Glasgow and the Gorbals advantages which, in their own way, outweighed their economic hardships: for here the Rule of Law took precedence over the whims of local rulers and the autocratic governments they had known. Living side by side in the Gorbals with Highlanders who had been forced out of their crofts and the Irish who had been starved out of their patches of land, relations between the three cultures were almost invariably good at the individual level. In fact, the Jews, being aligned neither to the green nor to the orange were free from involvement with that particular aspect of sport. Still the Jews, being by now good Glaswegians did have, as one would expect, their own amateur football team. It invariably lost its games with the consistency with which their chess players won their tournaments.

By the 1920's the Zionists in Glasgow had split into three distinct political groups. One, the B'nei Mizrahi, was a right-wing religious group. The second, Poalei Zion was a labour-socialist party affiliated to the British Labour Party. The third was the Central Zionist Organisation, a centre group which among Gorbals Jewry was the majority party.

Each of these groupings had their origins in eastern Europe and was brought to Glasgow by the immigrants as part of their mental baggage. In Glasgow, those who wished to join a revolutionary party joined the Communist Party while those who believed that the Jew could only obtain security in a country of his own, joined one of the Zionist groups. But even here there were differences. In the 1920's the active Zionists in Glasgow fell into one of two schools of thought. The first held the view that "while placing in the centre of our activity the material support for the building of our National Home, it is urgently necessary to strive for the activities in Palestine as central and held that all should be devoted to help the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine).

In the late 20's and early 1930's, the Arab massacre of Jews in Palestine, the Report of the Palestine Commission of Enquiry and the subsequent White Paper on British Policy in Palestine threw almost the whole of Glasgow Jewry firmly into the Zionist camp. Thus, by 1931 the main ideological aspect of social cohesion in Glasgow Jewry was Zionism rather than traditional religion. The community was both acculturating and reacting to the events of its time by seeking to use secular political actions rather than religious ones as such.

At the same time, the now settled Jewish community was playing an active part in British politics both at the local and the national level. Mannie Shinwell's activities are too well known to need repeating here. A Glasgow Jew was elected chairman of the city's L.P. Federation, and, as if to balance this, Maurice Bloch, who was later to be given a knighthood, stood as the Unionist candidate for the Gorbals as a National Government candidate in the 1931 General Election. A number of Glasgow Jews also won elected positions in local government both in Glasgow and in adjacent councils.

But soon the over-riding political concern of the Jews of Glasgow, most of whom still lived in the Gorbals although some had moved to various suburbs, was the rise to power of Nazi-ism in Germany. All the details of what this meant to German Jewry was well known to Glasgow Jewry through the factual and accurate account of these events which were published in Glasgow's own Jewish weekly newspaper, the 'Jewish Echo'.

It was as a reaction to this that a growing number of Glasgow Jews began to immigrate to Palestine and face immense difficulties there rather than remain in Glasgow in certain safety and some comfort. These were mainly drawn from the younger and more able and active sections of Glasgow Jewry.

The Gorbals Jews, born and bred in Glasgow, who went to Palestine played a crucial role there. They formed the embryonic civil service based on the British example of service and incorruptibility; they provided those who had the skills or whose skills could be acquired, a party to play in the underground defence services. Perhaps most important of all, they supplied a steady and growing stream of young people who had the courage either to establish new Kibbutzim (communal farms) or join those already in existence. These kibbutzim provided the sole living example of socialism and full communalism in practice. These people rejected the historical Jewish role of martyrdom and enforced petty trading. They cleared deserts of their stones, drained marshes of their diseases, and at great personal cost these pioneers transmuted wastelands into productive agricultural communities. They provided the leadership for the emerging state and were willing to face violent anti-Semitism with a gun in their hand as the only answer that could be understood by the prejudiced and the mentally-ill.

In Britain, the path was not so clear. Believing, rightly or wrongly, that the British upper-class establishment (with notable exceptions such as Winston Churchill) were essentially anti-Semitic while the left-wing parties opposed discrimination, many Jews had, at that time, more confidence in the political left-wing parties than in those of the right. But difficulties arose. The Labour Party and the left were adamantly opposed to re-armament while the Bolsheviks of the U.S.S.R. seemed the only group who were unequivocally opposed to Hitlerism. But Stalin signed a pact with Hitler and no foreign power would take even a strong diplomatic line in an attempt to save Jewish men, women and children in Germany and later in the countries conquered by the Nazi hordes.

Glasgow Jewry, now mainly native born, residents of the Gorbals, citizens of Britain, resolved the meaningless charge of dual loyalty. (Did not many of their accusers claim within the one breath that the Jews were simultaneously responsible both for capitalism and communism?) by fighting for Britain as if there were no White Paper, while seeking to establish a State of Israel as if there were no war.

In doing so, Gorbals Jewry remained firmly established as among the family of 'Jock Tamson's bairns' while attempting to help those who were less fortunate than themselves. This they did without compromising their Scottishness or the form of Judaism.



'GORBALS CROSS SUNDAY MORNING'

## HAT THEY SAID — Snippets from our Interviews

When I came here, I realised if I worked I could do anything. so I worked and I worked and I worked  
— I never felt tired then.

Benno Schotz

On a Sunday, everyone came to the Gorbals. You could go out to the shops and meet everyone, people who'd moved away, Jews, they all came back to the shops. And they'd all meet at the Cross. And it was so busy, everyone talking and being friends.

Mrs Woolfson

Many marriages started at the Institute.

Mrs Niren

Many of the Jews who came from Europe were Socialists — some had been in the Bund. They came to Glasgow and found a lot of people thinking the same way. I think this is why they settled here so well.

Ida Shuster

They were accepted in Scotland because the Scots were a Bible people, and so respected them.

Moray Glasser

My mother made quilts — every Jewish girl had at least one when she got married. They were special — called Perinas — like duvets now. They came from all over Glasgow to buy them from my mother.

Mrs Woolfson

It is a duty for us to look after the sick and the poor and those in trouble. So my father first visited Jews who were in hospital, and their families, and then he formed the Sick Visiting Association. Then some of the poor Jews who were in the Southern General — that was the work house then — wrote to him that they couldn't eat the food because it wasn't Kosher, and he had a Kosher kitchen set up, and from that grew much more — the Benevolent Loan Society, and the Jewish Dispensary, because often they were puzzled by doctors who didn't understand them, and whom they couldn't understand and then the Naturalization Society because to take out your papers from the normal lawyers cost £25.00 a great sum — and my father arranged things so that they could get their papers more quickly and much cheaper. One thing grew from another as different needs arose.

Moray Glasser

Even in the night sometimes, poor people would come — and she would give them soup, a meal, warmth by the fire.

Mrs Niren

They would make challent — a kind of hot-pot, meat and beans and dumplings and potatoes all together in a pot and take it to the bakers and it would cook all night, very slowly and it was good.

Mrs Woolfson

There was an old bakehouse in Hospital Street, Calendars, where the Nautical College is now, and that was a very well known bakers. They let the women come at certain times and use the bakehouse to bake their own bread and cakes and use the ovens, and that was a great meeting place for Jewish immigrant women. I went to Buchan Street School and that wasn't very far from Calendars and I used to go there from school to meet my mother. She'd maybe let us take some baking home with us, take it home in a big basin. They always talked away in Yiddish. They learned to speak English from their children.

Mr Balarski

On Sunday mornings, the men stood at Gorbals Cross, they also chatted in Yiddish. On one side they chatted, and on the other side, there were the Irish immigrants, but they got on together alright, there was never any friction.

Mr Balarski

It was hard work, it was pretty well sweated labour at that time. They worked very hard. Tailors, pressing, all that kind of thing. There wasn't the same machinery as today. A hard week's work — 5½ days — 8 till about 6 o'clock.

Mr Balarski



I remember when we used to play, and make a noise outside a certain woman's window, she would open the window shout out in her broken English "get away, or I'll make you black and red" and we used to shout up, "you mean black and blue, Mrs Cohen" and she would say "don't bother me mit colours".

Mr Balarski

The pale was full of small villages, about 100-200 Jewish families, and they lived in primitive conditions. My parents came because of the pogroms it was like a sport to go into the Jewish villages and beat up or kill Jews, for fun.

Mr Slater

The butchers shop was always very interesting — they always had this meat especially made for weddings. We called it Chasana-Fleisch — wedding meat. It was a huge mince loaf, but treated in such a way that it would be red and succulent, and it would be cut in slices. Oh, it was lovely.

Mrs Slater

The tailors union had split, some members thought that the union officials weren't doing the right thing.

There were these fellows, one who did, one who didn't support the split, arguing in the street. One was ILP, and the other was a Communist. The ILP man's name was Sammy and he lived one up. We heard a window creaking up, and a woman leaned over and said, "Are you coming, Sammy?" It was late evening. "Aye in a minute" The window shuddered. A few minutes later, the same thing. "Are you coming up, Sammy?" "Aye in a minute". The third time the window opened, a huge basin of water was thrown over them.

Mr Slater

We went to the Jewish School after ordinary school. We left school at 4.00 pm. We had to run home, grab something to eat, and be back at Elgin St. now Turiff Street. We went from 5 till 7, four days a week.

Mr Slater

This boat came up the Clyde — to where the Carrick stands now. Well, it used to be fishing boats came up there, and I used to go down with my mother and she'd get a big parcel of fish for about a shilling. Beautiful and fresh, it was mostly cod she got, and that with Ayrshire potatoes was a meal we used to have in the evening, and when I talk about it, I can taste it. And we used to play there, on the banks of the Clyde.

Mrs Balarski

I remember Mama, as if I could ever forget this woman, so full of warmth, strength, sincerity, and whose greatest pleasure was to give to all humanity — to those in need, hungry, cold, or just lonely — there was a place for everyone. People could come to her at anytime of day or night, and in all the years I remember, no-one was ever turned away. I remember many who were old, and how she fought for an old age home, so that the aged would never be cold.

Mrs Niren



## THE GORBALS - FROM THE CHILDREN OF TODAY

There was a Jewish comedian in the Gorbals. He used to sing in the Palace Theatre and his song

was

"Why do they say  
That I'm only a Jew  
and despise me  
Because of my breed?  
Gentile or Jew  
They're both just the same  
Though they may have  
A different creed.  
I've got a dad  
With a heart pure as gold  
And a Mother  
With love so divine  
So why do they say  
That I'm only a Jew  
When I'm one of G--d's  
Own man kind."

In the Gorbals there was a place called the Jewish Institute next door to the synagogue and all the young Jewish people went there for dancing and social events.

At the Gorbals Cross the men used to congregate there on a Sunday morning to have a chat with their friends just like a social event and men used to go around collecting money for charity.

## THE GORBALS

Around 1907 most of the Jewish people arrived in this country, and those who settled in Glasgow made their home in the Gorbals. The Gorbals was made up of very high flats and all had back yards, and very little greenery. My own great grandfather was a minister, teacher of Hebrew, and was in charge of the meat market for kosher food.

Many people who lived there, have become quite famous: Sir Monty Finnieston, Chairman of British Steel, Sir Isaac Wolfson, Benno Schatz, who is Scottish Sculptor to the Queen.

My own great grandma known as, "Mother of Glasgow", she had a very famous Kosher Hotel in the heart of the Gorbals. She was well known for the many good deeds she did for the poor, feeding and clothing them for nothing. During the war Jewish soldiers came to "Geneen's" for shelter and warmth.

When she died she was given a great honour usually reserved for Rabbis. The restaurant is also sadly missed and everybody still remembers it with great affection.

The Gorbals was also where most people had their businesses as well as their homes, as there was no Whitecraigs or Newton Mearns. Glasgow was much smaller and most Jewish people were much poorer.

Now the Gorbals has been transformed, the tenements have gone, most of the businesses have gone, and it is now a housing scheme. All the previous character has been lost.

## GLASGOW 1970

Where lunar landscapes pockmark once proud lands  
Where alkys sway past lovers holding hands  
Where houses dwindle while buildings grow tall  
Gleaming and brutal, where a concert hall  
Burnt many years before remains a shell,  
Where half the people live a life of hell  
And do not realise the hell they're living  
That in itself is something past forgiving,  
Here Glasgow flourishes like a garden weed  
A blowsy charrie tarted out in tweed  
A drunken, dowager, a hardman's whore  
A dream or nightmare that one can't ignore  
A pululating puddle ten miles wide  
Or more than that if you take in Strathclyde  
From Drum at one end Castlemilk the other  
The only one to love them is the mother  
Who gave them birth — rather who miscarried  
To hide the fact that she had never married  
Yet even though I castigate this slattern  
Who has more right than I to make a saturn —  
alia of all her faults and misdemeanours too  
Being born of her, Glaswegian through and through?

Ellis Sopher

## MRS MAC — GLASWEGIAN

He left me when our child was three months old.  
I don't miss him. By then I'd had enough.  
Women and drink were all he cared about  
I came in third being neither in his eyes  
This time he's living with a social worker  
Just round the corner. You really have to laugh  
Its got that daft when I do the shopping  
The butcher and the others turn and ask  
Which Mrs Mac is going to pay the bill?  
Well if you didn't laugh you'd weep.

The nursery keeps the kid while I'm at work  
But now I'll tell you what sticks in my craw.  
When he got up and left he took two things  
Picked up my bank book and my omelette pan  
The rotten bastard. He can keep the book  
But Christ I miss that bloody omelette pan.

ELLIS SOPHER

## The Decline of the Jewish Gorbals

The poor immigrant Jews who settled in the Gorbals in the late 19th and early twentieth Centuries worked hard at their shops and businesses, and sacrificed all to allow their children to have a good education at school and perhaps university. As their circumstances improved, many of them looked to the suburbs — to Govanhill, Queens Park, Battlefield, Pollokshields, and Shawlands. Although a congregation had been established in a tenement flat in Sinclair Drive as early as 1909, the exodus of the Jews from the Gorbals did not begin in earnest until the late Twenties and Thirties.

In 1926, the Langside Synagogue was opened in Niddrie Rd., in 1927 came the Queen's Park Synagogue in Falloch Rd., and in 1928 the Pollokshields Synagogue in Nithsdale Rd. There was still a sizeable Jewish community in the Gorbals on the eve of the Second World War, and the 'Jewish Chronicle' of 1935 maintains that 'it is at Gorbals where the majority of Jews still live'. However the community was definitely on the decline, and by the late 1930's the roll at the Hebrew school in Turiff St. had fallen from a one-time peak of 700 to just over 300 students.

By and large, the buildings of the Jewish community in the Gorbals remained in use long after those who had lived around them had moved elsewhere. Jews came from the suburbs to pray in the synagogues of the Gorbals and to shop in the Jewish butcher and baker shops, right up until the 1960s.

As the Jews moved South, the synagogues fell on hard times. In 1953, the Beth Jacob Synagogue in Abbotsford Place closed and amalgamated with the Chevra Kadisha Synagogue in Buchan St. In 1956, the New Central Synagogue in Hospital St. closed and joined with the synagogue in South Portland St. to form the Great Central Synagogue. The Hospital St. building was used as a factory, until its demolition in the 1970s.

Geneens Restaurant finally closed its doors in 1965, and the Talmud Torah Hebrew school soon after. In 1970 the Jewish Institute in South Portland St. moved to Pollokshields, and the building became an Irish social club, until demolition in the mid-1970s. At around the same time, the Board of Guardians moved from Thistle St. to become the Jewish Welfare Board in its new premises in Coplaw St.

The Chevra Kadisha-Beth Jacob Synagogue amalgamated with that in Pollokshields in 1972, and the Buchan St. building was bulldozed. Finally, in 1974, the Great Central Synagogue in South Portland St., the last Jewish communal building in the Gorbals, closed and was demolished, thus ending almost a century of Jewish settlement in the Gorbals.

The Gorbals has now been redeveloped, for better or for worse, and today there is no trace of the once vibrant and numerous Jewish community. But the Jewish experience in the Gorbals has not been forgotten. Wherever Gorbals Jews or their children have scattered — from New York to Jerusalem — the names of South Portland St., Abbotsford Place, Oxford St., Thistle St., and Gorbals Cross are recalled with affection.

## Postscript

This account of the Jewish Gorbals is by no means exhaustive, and there may be some inaccuracies. The authors would be grateful if readers would send us their comments, additions, and corrections, so that a revised edition can be produced at a later date.

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## FROM THE GORBALS FAIR SOCIETY

— to the Jews of the Gorbals wherever they are now.

This book, and the exhibition it accompanies, represents the first of a series of explorations of the roots of our community.

Writing the book, and building the exhibition has left us with many strong impressions, some happy, some sad, some hopeful. We have been astonished by the strength of affection still felt by Glasgow Jews for their first home in the city, and by the generosity with which they have helped us.

We have been saddened by the loss to the Gorbals of this teeming, tremendously articulate and lively population — undoubtedly a population tempered by experience into a weapon of survival.

We too in the Gorbals are once more fighting to survive — though our enemies of bad housing, loss of population, excessive unemployment, inner-city blight, may be different. We are strengthened by your example, and hope that our renewed connection may continue.

Thank you all for your help.